

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:**

The listing of claims below will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

**LISTING OF CLAIMS:**

Claims 1-4 (canceled).

Claim 5 (Original): A method for producing a magnetic recording medium comprising at least a nonmagnetic undercoat layer, a magnetic layer, and a protective layer laminated sequentially on a nonmagnetic substrate, comprising the step of:

forming said magnetic layer by RF sputtering of a sputtering target for the magnetic recording medium, and wherein

said sputtering target for the magnetic recording medium comprises a mixture of a metal and an oxide, and

a particle diameter of said oxide in the sputtering target is 10  $\mu\text{m}$  or less.

Claim 6 (Original): The method for producing a magnetic recording medium as claimed in claim 5, wherein the particle diameter of said oxide in the sputtering target is 5  $\mu\text{m}$  or less.

Claim 7 (Original): The method for producing a magnetic recording medium as claimed in claim 5, wherein said sputtering target is a mixture comprising an alloy containing at least Co and Pt, and at least one oxide selected from the group consisting of oxides of Si, Ti, Zr, Al and Cr.

Claim 8 (Original): The method for producing a magnetic recording medium as claimed in claim 6, wherein said sputtering target is a mixture comprising an alloy containing at least Co and Pt, and at least one oxide selected from the group consisting of oxides of Si, Ti, Zr, Al and Cr.

Claim 9 (Original). A magnetic recording medium comprising at least a nonmagnetic undercoat layer, a magnetic layer, and a protective layer laminated sequentially on a nonmagnetic substrate, wherein

the magnetic layer is a granular magnetic layer having a structure in which crystal grains containing Co and having ferromagnetism are surrounded with oxide grain boundaries,

the magnetic layer has been obtained by RF sputtering of a sputtering target for a magnetic recording medium, the sputtering target comprising a mixture of metal and an oxide, the oxide having a particle diameter of  $5\text{ }\mu\text{m}$  or less, and

defects attributed to particles of the oxide and measuring  $0.05\text{ }\mu\text{m}$  or more are not present on a surface of the magnetic recording medium.